

Stop the IT/GIS Battle!

Many Chief Information Officers (CIOs) cast a jaundiced eye on GIS, viewing it as a source of needless complication in their already complicated lives. This stems in part from the fact that GIS analysts can be high-maintenance — requiring very high-end workstations and administrative rights typically granted only to information technology (IT) support staff. A standard “Help Desk” is rendered nearly ineffective in the face of the demands made by GIS staff. And when GIS staff are developing applications, it adds more fuel to the fire, especially when such development occurs outside of the normal IT project governance process and without the oversight and discipline now seen as best practice. Taken together, these factors give GIS a bad name and reputation among CIOs.



business units need to keep their eyes on the real prize, which is the organization’s business or programmatic needs. Research and development are all well and good, but all technology initiatives should be directed at meeting specific business requirements. To realize this, the umbrella organization must first make clear its strategies, goals, and objectives and strive to document, standardize, and optimize its business processes. Then both the GIS and IT staff should align their efforts with these needs.

Second, a clear distinction should be made between GIS staff and resources that are being used to conduct analysis and those that are being directed at developing applications or providing services that span the enterprise. The former should

any units that have a legitimate need and are large and important enough to the enterprise. It should also establish a central GIS shop to serve the needs of programs that do not rise to the level of requiring their own GIS staff. This central shop should also manage enterprisewide issues like data standards and a geospatial data library. The shop should either be located in, or work closely with, the IT shop on enterprise IT architecture and applications.

Gone are the days when solutions were looked at as being “GIS” or something else. Today’s enterprise applications often require a rich mix of functions, including geospatial processes. Merge the two disciplines and reap the rewards. But whatever you do, stop the squabbling.

John Ellison

Agency Technology Officer
California Resources Agency

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CIOs usually do one of two things. They either try to ignore GIS, hoping it will simply go away, or they isolate and contain it within their shop, attempting to deny it light and sustenance. Neither strategy serves the best interest of the organization, and both lead to low morale. This enhances the perception among business units that IT is overly controlling and unresponsive.

So what can be done to correct this situation?

To begin with, the IT, GIS, and

be viewed within the domain of the business units and the latter should be closely partnered with the IT shop. The GIS folks would be well-served to take advantage of the hard-learned lessons of their IT counterparts and adopt best-practice project management techniques.

Finally, the organization should structure itself to take best advantage of what these technologies and staff offer. GIS analysts should be located within

Scottie Barnes responds...

Thank you for your well-crafted response to the May 2005 “Beyond the Niche” editorial. It’s hard to believe that conflict between GIS and IT staff is still a relevant topic 15 years after Geospatial Solutions first went to press, but it is. Fortunately, though, as the benefits of geospatial applications have become more readily apparent, organizations are realizing that they must unite the disciplines to reap the rewards, just as you stated. Of course, the best way to maintain the momentum is to advance the dialogue through conversations just like this.

Notes from readers are greatly appreciated, so thank you again! 🌐

